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Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General strongly condemns bomb attack on Israeli bus in Tel Aviv; hopes savage act of terrorism will not disrupt talks between Government of Israel and PLO.

+ Increased trade is essential for economic growth and development, and reinforces international peace and security, Secretary-General tells United Nations Trade Efficiency Symposium.

+ Several States reiterate opposition to United States economic embargo against Cuba, in report of Secretary-General.

+ Completion of Russian troop withdrawals from Baltic States would enhance stability in region, says Secretary-General; commends parties for demonstrating political will and spirit of compromise.

+ Member States owe United Nations $2.5 billion as of 15 October; $812 million owed to regular budget and $1.7 billion to peace-keeping.

+ Legal Committee begins discussion of measures to eliminate international terrorism; Russian Federation proposes global monitoring unit within United Nations Secretariat.

+ UNPROFOR Commander meets with Bosnian Vice-President to discuss violations of Mount Igman demilitarization agreement.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has condemned in the strongest possible terms today's bomb attack on an Israeli bus in Tel Aviv, in which more than 20 civilians were killed and dozens wounded. He extended his condolences to the bereaved families, and expressed the hope that the savage act of terrorism would not disrupt the negotiations between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

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Increased international trade is essential for economic growth and reinforces every dimension of development, according to the Secretary-General. In an address today to the ministerial segment of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency, in Columbus, Ohio, he said trade also helped to enhance international confidence and trust and thus contributed to the maintenance of international peace and security.

The Symposium -- the first high-level United Nations conference hosted by the United States -- marked the beginning of a new partnership between the Organization, national governments, local government and the private sector, he continued. Trade was no longer a matter only of ports and railroads and airline routes; it had become electronic, and might soon be completely paperless. Economic globalization raised important questions for an international system based on sovereign States. However, the United Nations had been created to enable States to solve common problems, and had a development role set out in Article 55 of the Charter.

The Secretary-General noted that the Symposium aimed to reduce trade costs by targeting six areas: government controls, which could be excessive or inefficient; the availability of financial services; business information; transportation; telecommunications; and business practices, which meant global standards and transparency. The Trade Point concept could spearhead the effort to improve efficiency.

The United Nations was indispensable for coordinated action on a global scale, he stressed. It had convening power, extensive networks and a body of experts, and could help design initiatives, support strategies, and provide training and capacity-building assistance. However, a united commitment from government and business leaders was also needed to make trade efficiency a reality.

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A number of Member States have reiterated their support for General Assembly resolution 48/16, entitled "Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba", which was adopted in November 1993. Their views on the matter are contained in a report by the Secretary-General, dated 20 September, on the implementation of the resolution.

Mexico said it continued to abide by the resolution, stressing that it pursued non-discriminatory trade practices and did not recognize the extraterritorial application of domestic laws. Nicaragua rejected as a matter of principle economic and commercial embargoes as a means of applying political pressure, and maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba. Spain said it had never promulgated any laws in relation to Cuba which might have entailed a violation of the principles of sovereign equality of States, non-interference in their internal affairs, and freedom of trade and navigation.

The United Kingdom stressed its opposition to the extraterritorial extension of the United States embargo in the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992. It was an offence for any person in the United Kingdom to comply with specified parts of the United States Cuban Assets Control Regulations. The United States said it had voted against resolution 48/16 as it pertained to what was essentially a bilateral issue and should not be the subject of multilateral consideration.

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The Secretary-General has commended Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Russian Federation for resolving problems related to the presence of foreign forces in the Baltic States. In a report to the General Assembly dated 22 September, he said they had demonstrated a constructive attitude, political will and a spirit of compromise. The completion of the Russian troop withdrawals would enhance stability and the development of good relations and cooperation in the region.

However, there were still some points of concern, he continued. Estonia and Latvia had expressed anxiety regarding the fact that Russia had allegedly demobolized a significant number of officers in those countries, instead of repatriating them. They had also called attention to the environmental damage caused by the deployment of Russian troops on their territories. He reiterated his readiness to provide his good offices to facilitate the full implementation of the agreements reached by the parties, should they so wish.

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As of 15 October, Member States owed the United Nations a total of $2.5 billion, according to the latest update on the Organization's financial situation. Of that amount, $812 million was for assessments for the regular budget and $1.7 billion was for peace-keeping operations.

The United States -- the largest debtor -- owed $531 million to the regular budget and $453 million to the peace-keeping budget. The Russian Federation owed $28 million to the regular budget and $569 million to peace-keeping.

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The Sixth Committee (Legal) today began its consideration of measures to eliminate international terrorism. Speakers highlighted the need for international cooperation to combat a resurgence of terrorism, with several proposing the establishment of an international database to coordinate information and provide technical advice. The Russian Federation, on behalf of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), said a global monitoring unit within the United Nations Secretariat could help States deal with political and legal issues relating to international terrorism.

Germany, on behalf of the European Community and Austria, said an exchange of information and close cooperation would strengthen the ability of Governments to prevent terrorism and apprehend those responsible. However, all measures against terrorism must conform with international law, including human rights instruments. The Czech Republic opposed the convening of an international conference on terrorism, as it would be difficult to agree on a definition of terrorism and the conference could thus be be counterproductive. Intensified application of existing international conventions was the best way to deal with the problem.

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The Commander of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lieutenant-General Michael Rose, yesterday had discussions with Bosnian Vice-President Ejup Ganic regarding the demilitarized zone around Mount Igman. A United Nations spokesman said the Bosnian Government had some 500 troops stationed within the zone in violation of the demilitarization agreement with the Bosnian Serbs.

That bilateral agreement was negotiated last year by UNPROFOR at the request of the Bosnian Government, the spokesman noted. He added that it had been largely honoured by the Bosnian Serbs.

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